

State House Express Activity Packet

Eagleton Institute of Politics



Research shows that the benefits of field trips can be endless. It has been found that field trips encourage students to engage in more critical and creative thinking outside the bounds of the classroom and allow students to engage more actively in the learning process.¹ In order for the highest potential benefits to be reached, the activities prior, during, and after the trip are critical.

This packet was put together by the Eagleton Institute of Politics in order to supplement State House Express tours. Included in this packet are various activities that have been demonstrated to enhance field trips. Please note that a few of these activities would be appropriate and beneficial either before or after the visit such as the "How a Bill Becomes a Law" activity listed as an activity to utilize after the tour of the State House.

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¹ Higgins, Noelle, Elaine Dewhurst, and Los Watkins. "Field Trips as Teaching Tools in the Law Curriculum." *Research in Education* 88 (2012): 102-106. Print.

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Pre-Visit Activities

The time prior to any field trip is crucial. About a week or two before the trip, teachers should work on building excitement and readiness for their trip. Below are some activities that teachers might follow to prepare their students.

Word Cloud!

Pre- and Post- Visit Activity

Overview: This activity is designed to get students excited for their State House Express tour. This will allow teachers to gauge what their students know prior to the tour and will allow teachers/students to compare their preconceptions to the knowledge gained after the tour.

Objective(s):

- Students will be able to discuss the knowledge they have about the State House and the legislative process.

Materials Needed:

- Sticky notes (index cards or pieces of paper can be alternatives)
- Projector
- Internet access
- White or chalk board

When Activity Should Take Place: 1-3 days prior to tour, and 1 day after the tour.

Websites (use any of the following):

- www.wordle.net
- www.worditout.com
- www.tagul.com

Directions:

1. Ask students to take 6 sticky notes, but don't tell them why they're being asked to take the notes.
2. Once each student has their sticky notes, ask students:
 - a. First: "What 2 words come to mind when you hear **State House**?" Write "State House" on black/white board. Then ask students to write each of

the words that came to mind on separate sticky notes (there should only be ONE word per sticky note). Once each student writes their word, ask students to stick their sticky notes on the black/white board under “State House”

- b. Second: “What 2 words come to mind when you hear **legislature?**” Ask students to repeat the same steps mentioned in (a).
 - c. Third: “What 2 words come to mind when you hear **citizen?**” Ask students to repeat the same steps mentioned in (a).
3. Using one of the websites provided above, create a “Word Cloud” with the words provided by students. This can be done in class or at home (the finalized word cloud should be presented to students the next day).
 4. Lead a discussion about the word cloud their responses formed. Ask your students:
 - a. What words are larger than others? Why do you think that is?
 - b. Do you think any words are missing? Why would you add this word?
 5. Repeat the same activity after the tour and see how word clouds compare/contrast.

Additional Notes:

- **For older\advanced students:** In addition to discussion, it may be useful to have students write a reflection paper expanding on questions/topics brought up in discussion.

What Does the State House Mean To You?

Pre- and Post- Visit Activity

Overview: This activity is designed to get students excited for their State House Express tour. This will allow teachers to gauge what their students know prior to the tour and will allow teachers/students to compare their preconceptions to the knowledge gained after the tour.

Objective(s): Students will be able to discuss the knowledge they have about the State House and the legislative process.

Standards Met:

- **NJCCSS: 6.1.4. D.17** Explain the role of historical symbols, monuments, and holidays and how they affect the American identity.

Materials Needed:

- Poster board or large white sheets of paper
- Crayons, markers, etc.

When Activity Should Take Place: 1-3 days prior to tour, and 1 day after the tour.

Directions:

1. Ask students to form pairs (this activity can be done alone as well) and pass each student and/or pair a poster board.
2. Ask students to draw a picture that represents what they think of the State House. Examples include:
 - a. What they think the State House looks like (inside and outside)
 - b. An image of themselves at the State House
 - c. Symbols that represent the NJ State House/Government
 - d. Images of what they already know about the NJ State House or what they want to know
3. If time permits, ask students to share what they have drawn.
4. Repeat the same activity after the tour and see how posters compare/contrast.

Additional Notes:

- **For older/advanced students:** Ask students to write 1-2 paragraphs to accompany their posters.
- Hang posters up in classroom to get students excited for the tour.
- **For after the tour:** Ask students to draw a poster about something interesting or important they learned and have them teach or explain that specific aspect to the class. Remaining students can take notes on the presentations.

Journal Prompt
Pre- and Post- Visit Activity

Overview: Goal of this activity is to get students excited for their State House Express tour, as well as allow students to be self-reflective. This will allow teachers to gauge what their students know prior to the tour and will allow teachers/students to compare their preconceptions to the knowledge gained after the tour.

Objectives:

- Students will be able to discuss the knowledge they have about the State House and the legislative process.
- Students will be able to reflect on what they learned on their State House Express tour.

Standards Met:

- **NJCCSS: 6.1.4.A.7** Explain how the United States functions as a representative democracy, and describe the roles of elected representatives and how they interact with citizens at local, state, and national levels.
- **NJCCSS: 6.1.4.A.11** Explain how the fundamental rights of the individual and the common good of the country depend upon all citizens exercising their civic responsibilities at the community, state, national, and global levels.
- **6.1.4.A.12** Explain the process of creating change at the local, state, or national level.

Materials Needed:

- Pages provided below

When Activity Should Take Place: 1-2 days prior to visit, and 1 day after the visit.

Directions:

1. Provide students packet below
2. Explain directions/purpose of this activity

Journal Prompt for State House Express Tour



Before the visit...

Directions: On a separate sheet of paper, address the following questions in at least 3 paragraphs.

- What do you think is the role of the State House?
- What decisions do you think are made at the State House?
- What do you expect to learn on the State House Express tour?
- What do you hope to learn on the State House Express tour? Why?
- What role can a citizen play at the State House?

After the visit...

Directions: On a separate sheet of paper, address the following questions in at least 3 paragraphs. You may use your notes from the visit.

- What is the role of the State House?
- What decisions are made at the State House?
- What did you learn on your tour? What do you wish you learned on the tour?
- How does the tour relate to other lessons we've had this year?
- What did you learn about being an active citizen?

Notes

Use space below to take notes during your State House tour.

Take a Stand²
Pre-Visit Activity

Overview: Goal of this activity is to introduce students to the legislation that will be used in the *Make-A-Law!* simulation. This activity will give students an opportunity to learn more about the legislation.

Objectives:

- Students will be able to analyze and discuss a piece of New Jersey Legislation (S246).
- Students will be able to formulate an opinion on a piece of New Jersey Legislation (S246).

Standards Met:

- **NJCCSS: 6.3.4.A.1** Evaluate what makes a good rule or law.
- **NJCCSS: 6.3.8.A.1** Deliberate on a public issue affecting an upcoming election, consider opposing arguments, and develop a reasoned conclusion.
- **NJCCSS: 6.3.8.D.1** Engage in simulated democratic processes (e.g., legislative hearings, judicial proceedings, elections) to understand how conflicting points of view are addressed in a democratic society.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2** Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

Materials Needed: Printed out copies of the S426 legislation and/or background fact sheet. These documents can be found at: <http://yppp.rutgers.edu/for-teachers/state-house-express/the-make-a-law-simulation-2014-2015/>

Directions:

1. Individually or with a partner, have students read the S426 legislation and/or background fact sheet. Encourage students to take notes and/or highlight parts of the document they find important.

² Activity Adapted from: Rubin, Beth C. *Making Citizens: Transforming Civic Learning for Diverse Social Studies Classrooms*. New York: Routledge, 2012.

2. After students are finished reading, explain the “Take-A-Stand” activity. Explain to students that they will be standing up in the front of the room in a straight line (on a continuum). Explain to students that you are going to read a list of statements and that students must place themselves on the line according to whether they agree or disagree with the statement or are somewhere in the middle. The left side of the line represents agree, the right side of the line represents disagree, and the middle of the line indicates somewhere in the middle.
3. Ask students if they have any questions.
4. Have students go to the front of the room.
5. Read a sample statement such as “chocolate is the best type of ice cream” so students can practice the activity. Students will “take a stand” and place themselves on the line according to their opinion.
6. Begin reading the statements below. After each statement, make sure to ask students why they agree or disagree or are undecided. Offer students an opportunity to change their position on the line if their opinion has changed.
 - a. I believe the passing of bill S426 would benefit many students.
 - b. I believe bill S426 is a fair bill.
 - c. I believe bill S426 should be passed.
7. Ask students to write an essay explaining why they believe S426 should or should not be passed. Make sure to instruct students to use the background fact sheet and legislation to write their essay. Depending on how much time remains, students might do this in class or for homework.

In addition to these activities, here are some other ways to get students ready to visit the State House:

- **Rules and Logistics:** Students should be aware of the rules of the State House and the agenda for the day of the trip.
- **Visiting New Jersey Legislature Website:** Either on the SmartBoard or individually, have students explore the New Jersey Legislature website. Some useful pages include the “State House Activity Book” and “A Student’s Guide to the Legislative Process”. Both can be found under additional resources at: yppp.rutgers.edu/for-teachers/state-house-express/
- **Building Excitement:** Show pictures from the State House to students via PowerPoint or printouts, share interesting facts about the State House, etc. Some other examples include using the seating chart of legislatures from the NJ Legislative Website (njleg.state.nj.us/members/charts.asp) and showing students where their district representatives are located on that chart.
- **Primary Documents:** In alignment with the Common Core Standards, this can be an efficient way to get students excited for your trip. In addition to the New Jersey Constitution, teachers can have students read and analyze public hearings (njleg.state.nj.us/legislativepub/pubhear.asp) and bills (njleg.state.nj.us/bills/bills0001.asp) that were voted on in the State House.
- **Making A Connection:** Give students opportunities to explore the relevance of the trip to the “real world” and their own lives. Provide students examples of bills that have been passed and discussed in the State House that relate to them, such as bills that would lengthen the school day.
- **Guest Speaker:** Contact one of your district’s legislators or other public officials to come in as a guest speaker, or schedule a Skype session. Contact information for legislators according to their district can be found here: njleg.state.nj.us/districts/districtnumbers.asp

Activities for During the Visit

Although State House tours are mostly controlled by the tour guides, teachers can still play an important role in making the trip engaging. Incorporating student projects and activities into the trip can be a meaningful tool.

Trip Journal Activity During Visit

Overview: Goal of this activity is to keep students engaged during their State House Express tour. This activity will encourage students to be attentive and observant of the State House Express environment. This will also provide materials for students and teachers to reflect upon after the trip.

Objectives: Students will be able to illustrate important aspects of their State House Express tour in their journals.

Materials Needed:

- Notebooks or blank sheets of paper students can write on during the trip
- Pens/pencils

When Activity Should Take Place: During the visit

Directions:

1. On the day before the State House tour, explain to students that they will be keeping a journal during the trip. Either distribute pieces of paper to fold in half to make own journals or remind them to bring a notebook on the day of the trip.
2. On the day before the tour and/or on the bus on the way to the tour, explain to students they will be journaling throughout their trip. Explain that it can be stream of consciousness, how they feel throughout the tour, what they see, interesting facts they learn, people they see, etc. Essentially you want to encourage students to capture their trip in their journal.
3. Either on the way home from the trip or the day following the trip, ask students to share some of the things that they wrote in their journal. Their journals can serve as a starting point into a larger discussion about the State House and what was learned.

State House Express Photography
Activity During and Post Visit Activity

Overview: Goal of this activity is to keep students engaged during their State House Tour. Students will take photos during the trip to college images to use for collages, scrapbooks multimedia slideshows, etc.

Objectives:

- Students will be able to reflect on aspects of the tour by taking pictures at the State House and creating a presentation/ a poster/ a writing prompt.

Materials Needed: Disposable camera, digital camera, OR phone with camera

When Activity Should Take Place: During and after visit

Directions:

1. **Day before trip:** Explain to students that they will be required to take at least 10 pictures during their tour (you can alter the number as you see fit). Students might bring their phones if it's equipped with a camera or bring in a disposable or digital camera. Remind students that the photos must be relevant to the State House (if the only pictures they have are of their friends, it will be difficult to complete the second portion of this activity).
2. **During trip:** Remind students about taking pictures at the State House.
3. **After visit:** There are various ways to use the pictures. Choose any option that you believe fits best for your students.
 - a. **Creating a presentation:** Have students create a slideshow of their pictures on PowerPoint or some other presentation application (this can be done individually or in pairs/groups). Have students present their slideshows and explain why they took the pictures they did and their significance.
 - b. **Writing prompt:** Have students choose 1 or 2 pictures from their collection of photos and write an essay about specific picture(s). Have students write about what the picture is, why they took a picture of it, and what its significance is to the State House.

- c. **Create a Collage or Poster:** Have students print out the pictures they took to create a collage or poster. This can be accompanied by a writing portion by having students write about their visit and some of the pictures included on their collage/poster.

In addition to these activities, here are other ways to increase opportunities for engagement during your visit:

- **Create-a-game:** Have students take down notes and sketches in notebooks during tour. Use this information gathered for games or projects in upcoming lessons.
 - **Pictography:** have students guess that other students' sketches represent and have "artists" explain it.
- **Quiz writing:** Make up questions for a quiz near the end of trip or during an upcoming class.

Post-Visit Activities

Once students have taken the tour, it is vital for teachers to prepare at least a lesson or two for students to discuss and review what they have learned. Teachers might also find ways to connect what is discussed or learned in these follow-up lessons with future lessons. A reminder that many of the “pre” activities outlined earlier have “post” components.

Writing Letters to Legislators Post-Visit Activity

Overview: Goal of this activity is to connect what students learned at their State House Express tour to their real lives. Students will have the chance to explore issues in their communities and write to their legislatures about this particular issue.

Objectives:

- Students will be able to construct letters to their legislators.
- Students will be able to identify issues in their school/community that they care about.
- Students will be able to conduct research on their legislators(s) and bills.

Standards Met:

- **NJCCSS: 6.1.4.A.7** Explain how the United States functions as a representative democracy, and describe the roles of elected representatives and how they interact with citizens at local, state, and national levels.
- **NJCCSS: 6.1.4.A.11** Explain how the fundamental rights of the individual and the common good of the country depend upon all citizens exercising their civic responsibilities at the community, state, national, and global levels.
- **NJCCSS: 6.1.4.A.12** Explain the process of creating change at the local, state, or national level.
- **NJCCSS: 6.3.4.A.1** Evaluate what makes a good rule or law.

Materials Needed: Paper, sticky-notes (optional)

When Activity Should Be Used: After visit

Directions:

1. Pass out one sticky-note to each student and ask them to write down 1 important issue they see in their community that should be addressed. You may provide examples such as littering, the need for a new park, violence in community, etc. Ask students to stick their sticky-notes on the board once they are done.
2. Read some of the sticky-notes to the class.
3. Ask students: Who might you contact to address these types of issues? (try and connect to recent State House trip).
4. Explain to students that they will be given the opportunity to write a letter to their legislators about an issue that they care about in their community. Instruct students that this activity will have two main components: researching and letter writing.
5. Part 1 – Research: Instruct students to conduct research. For example: Require students to research who addresses their specific issue e.g. specific legislator(s), relevant committees, etc., bills that are relevant to their issue, etc.
6. Part 2 – Letter Writing: Once students have completed their research, instruct students to address the following in their letters (you may modify as you see fit):
 - a. What is the problem?
 - b. Why should it be fixed?
 - c. Who would benefit from this problem from being fixed?
 - d. What are some possible solutions?
7. If time/resources allows:
 - a. Allow students to peer edit each other's letters
 - b. Allow students to read their letters to the class
 - c. Allow students to type up their letters
 - d. You may to choose to mail letters to the legislators. Addresses can be found here: <http://www.njleg.state.nj.us/districts/districtnumbers.asp>

Additional Notes:

- **Adding research component:**
 - Have students research their legislators. It may be valuable to require students to connect their chosen issue to a bill that their legislator(s) have supported.

 - Have students research their particular issue. Have students include statistics and other information that will back up their argument.

- **Adding photo component:**
 - Have students take and include photos that help support their argument. For instance, if a student chooses that litter in their community is a public problem, have the student take photos of it and include it in their letter.

How a Bill Becomes a Law³
Post-Visit Activity

Overview: The goal of this activity is to give students the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the legislative process.

Objectives:

- Students will be able to demonstrate what they learned on their State House Express tour.
- Students will be able to discuss and explain the legislative process.
- Students will be able to identify current legislation.
- Students will be able to clearly express their opinions regarding current legislation.

Standards Met:

- **NJCCSS: 6.1.4.A.12** Explain the process of creating change at the local, state, or national level.
- **NJCCSS: 6.1.4.A.1** Explain how rules and laws created by community, state, and national governments protect the rights of people, help resolve conflicts, and promote the common good.
- **NJCCSS: 6.1.12.A.14.a** Evaluate the effectiveness of the checks and balances system in preventing one branch of national government from usurping too much power during contemporary times.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7** Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.

Materials Needed: "How a Bill Becomes a Law in New Jersey" PDF which can be found: www.njleg.state.nj.us/kids/StudGuideCompReadhorizsprds.pdf

When Activity Should Be Used: After visit

³ Activity adapted from: "Kids in the House." - *Office of the Clerk, U.S. House of Representatives*. Web. 6 Feb. 2015. <<http://kids.clerk.house.gov/teaching-resources.html>>.

Directions:

1. To help introduce students to the upcoming activity, lead a brief discussion to assess the students' understanding of the legislative process:
 - How does a bill become a law in New Jersey? Who is involved?
 - Why do we have laws? What makes a good law?
2. Ask students to read the content of the "How a Bill Becomes a Law in NJ" found at: www.njleg.state.nj.us/kids/StudGuideCompReadhorizsprds.pdf individually or in groups. Encourage students to take notes and write down any unanswered questions they may have.
3. Once students have completed the reading, have them answer and discuss the Comprehensive Questions and Critical Thinking Questions below as a group. You may select which questions you see fit for your students:

Comprehensive Questions

- Where do ideas for laws come from?
- When is a bill introduced?
- What happens to a bill while it is in committee?
- What happens when a committee approves a bill?
- How many votes does a bill need in order to be passed?
- If both Houses agree on the bill, where does it go?
- What is a "veto"?
- How does the legislature pass a bill that has been vetoed by the governor?

Critical Thinking Questions

- Why is it important that both Houses agree on a bill before it is sent to the Governor?
 - Why should the Governor have a say in which bills become laws?
 - How would a legislator's personal experiences affect the way he or she votes on legislation?
4. **Create A Map:** Ask students to get in pairs and give each pair one sheet of large white paper. Explain to students that their goal is to create their own "map" of how a bill becomes a law in the state of New Jersey. Encourage students to use the "How a Bill Becomes a Law in NJ" document to help them create their map. However, also encourage them to avoid simply copying the map (e.g. suggest they rephrase sections in their own words, draw/print out images to attach onto their map, etc.)

Additional Notes:

- Hang maps around the room and have class observe each other's posters—how do they compare/contrast?

- Hold a discussion or assign essay component. Questions might include:
 - What do you think is the most important step in the legislative process? What do you think is the least important? Why?

 - Do you think any step should be removed, changed, or added? If so, which one(s)? Why?

 - Do you think this is a fair process? Why or why not?

In addition to these activities, here are other ways to effectively follow-up your State House visit with your students:

- **Games/activities:** Allow students to have fun while reflecting on what they have learned on their trip! Some examples of engaging activities include “Jeopardy” and “Pictography”. To make the games as effective as possible, make sure to use as much information from the trip as you can.

- **Send a thank you note(s) to State House tour leader.**